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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 001012

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [LH](#) [RS](#) [UP](#)

SUBJECT: SU-27 CRASH: LITHUANIA TAKING DECISIONS ON BLACK BOXES, PILOT

REF: A. SECSTATE 176092

[1](#)B. VILNIUS 993

Classified By: Political-Economic Officer Nancy Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The GOL accepted Ukraine's offer of assistance in analyzing data on the black boxes recovered from the Russian Su-27. The Government softened its rhetoric against Russia today, stating that there is no evidence to prove the Russian aircraft willfully violated Lithuanian airspace and that the incident posed no real threat to security. Lithuanian officials are working to expedite the Su-27 pilot's return to Russia. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador and DCM discussed with Minister of Defense Kirkilas and other GOL officials Lithuania's plans for moving forward on the investigation of the crashed Su-27 per ref A instructions. Kirkilas reported to the Ambassador September 23 that Ukraine has offered to send a mobile team to Vilnius to decode the black box, and asked whether the USG had any concerns about Lithuania accepting the offer. MOD U/S Renatas Norkus noted that France, which reportedly has mobile decoding capability, did not respond on September 22 to Lithuania's urgent request for assistance on this matter. Ambassador acknowledged that the Ukrainian offer represented an immediate resolution to the decoding issue and advised the GOL to accept it. (The Ministry of Defense subsequently told the local press that the Ukrainians would do the job.) Drawing on ref A points, Ambassador suggested that the GOL submit a formal request to NATO for help on other aspects of the investigation, and the DefMin agreed to do so.

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador told Kirkilas, as he had FM Valionis on September 22, that the GOL should allow pilot Valery Troyanov's return to Russia. Kirkilas agreed (as had Valionis) and said the GOL is working with the Prosecutor General to effect the release as soon as possible. President Adamkus also told the Ambassador today that he wanted Troyanov released "as soon as possible." The DefMin and Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces met with the pilot and his wife September 23 to, in his words, "emphasize humanitarian support for this family that has been caught in a quite unusual situation." U/S Norkus told DCM that the pilot could be released as early as September 24 or 25.

[1](#)4. (C) To give the Lithuanians political cover to get the pilot out of here and combat charges that NATO allies had abandoned the GOL, the Ambassador provided a radio interview in which he:

-- praised Lithuania's calm, constructive response and decision to work with the Russians in an open, transparent investigation;

-- expressed expectation of a quick and smooth resolution;

-- noted that the matter attracted NATO attention as well, and that while he couldn't speak for NATO, he was sure the alliance would work closely with the Lithuanians on any appropriate follow-up; and

-- expressed U.S. enthusiasm for the assumption of its NATO air patrol responsibilities in the Baltics next week.

We provided these remarks to the MFA and distributed them to the local wire service for the widest play.

[1](#)5. (U) The Minister of Defense, presenting preliminary conclusions regarding the plane in a press conference later on September 23, said he had no evidence that the Russian plane's violation of Lithuanian airspace was deliberate. "Based on the latest information I have received today, I would like to declare with responsibility that the widely-discussed possibility of a willful violation of Lithuania's airspace can be discarded. Today we do not possess any facts to prove it," the Minister told the press. Kirkilas also emphasized that the incident "poses no real threat to the security of our country, NATO, and the EU."

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: The GOL is working quietly off-camera with NATO partners and others allies to complete the investigation

of the crash. Today's more amicable public line reflects the GOL's hope for a concomitant cooling of rhetoric from Russia.

17. (S) One element of ref A that we have not yet shared with the Lithuanians is our judgment that the incident resulted from equipment failure. Such an analysis will prompt questions here about our interpretation of the pilot's disengagement from a formation flying over the Baltic Sea, his switched-off transponder, his reported repeated circling of Kaunas, and misleading Russian responses about the plane's cargo. We would much appreciate more information on the U.S. analysis in order to fend off such questions.

KELLY